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ABSTRACT

The document examines the influence of political television commercials on voting behavior. In addition, the paper reports new data concerning the role of voter-oriented ads in socializing children to the political environment. Part I characterizes political ads and presents findings and conclusions of three voter surveys recently published in "Public Opinion Quarterly." The method used in the reported surveys was to conduct interviews with 835 representative voters in Wisconsin, Colorado, and Michigan gubernatorial and congressional campaigns. Findings indicated that significant cognitive changes occurred among voters who watched political TV ads, but that attitude changes were related to preexisting ideological orientations and to the degree of attention paid by the voter to the ads. Relationships between voter attitudes, knowledge, exposure and attention to political ads, and voter turnout are discussed. Part II focuses on the relationship between campaign advertising and political socialization of children. It was hypothesized that children who view political commercials would know more about a candidate and like the candidate better than children who were less exposed to the messages. Findings from a survey of 120 elementary school students indicated moderate to strong relationships between viewing of political ads and knowledge about and positive attitudes toward the advertised candidate. It was concluded that campaign advertising directed at adult voters may play a significant role in socializing children to the political environment. (Author/DB)

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# POLITICAL ADVERTISING EFFECTS ON VOTERS AND CHILDREN

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POLITICAL ADVERTISING EFFECTS ON VOTERS AND CHILDREN

In the past decade, political candidates have increasingly relied on television advertising as the primary means of communicating with the electorate. There is little precise evidence regarding the impact of these paid messages on the voter, however. This paper presents a model of political advertising effects and describes findings and conclusions based on survey investigations recently published in Public Opinion Quarterly (Atkin and Heald, 1976; Atkin, Bowen, Nayman and Sheinkopf, 1973). In addition, the paper reports new data concerning the role of these voter-oriented ads in socializing children to the political environment.

Political ads are typically disseminated during the final two-to-six weeks of an election campaign. The impact is jointly determined by an interaction between the qualitative and quantitative nature of the advertising messages and the affective predispositions of the receivers in the audience. The advertisements are designed to move the sponsoring candidate's image toward the positive extreme of an implicit evaluative continuum in the voter's mind (and/or move the opponent in a negative direction), and to translate this internal preference into overt behavior at the polls. The voter's objective is to distinguish between competing candidates and form a preferential ranking consistent with his existing attitudinal structure, and to decide whether to vote on election day.

Attitude. Specific attitude toward a candidate is a multiplicative product of three key elements, (a) the voter's values regarding ideal personal attributes of an office holder (competence, trustworthyness, race, region) and ideological orientations toward other relevant political objects (party, issues, leaders), (b) the agenda salience priorities

among these attributes and objects in the campaign context, and (c) the knowledge and beliefs linking the candidate to the attributes and objects. Since these elements are multiplied, all three must have a non-zero value before attitudinal effects are produced.

Personal values and ideology are developed slowly over a period of years as the individual is exposed to social, cultural, and media influences. Since most of these predispositions are firmly established and stable, political advertising is not likely to change them significantly; the direct impact of ads occurs primarily at the cognitive level. Advertising can be effective in creating or changing knowledge/belief linkages and in altering the relative salience of the object/attribute criteria for judging the candidate. These altered cognitions then combine with the affective predispositions to trigger indirect change in candidate attitude.

It is clear from this model that the same advertising can have both positive and negative attitudinal consequences, depending on who is receiving the message. The pragmatically sophisticated advertising strategist will attempt to establish linkages between the candidate and those personal qualities and ideological positions favored by a substantial majority of the target audience. Since some of these associations will not be favorably viewed by some voters reached by the advertising, counterproductive antagonistic responses are inevitable.

Behavior. The voting turnout decision is determined by a number of factors, including campaign interest, candidate attitude, discrepancy between candidates, and citizen duty norms. Advertising can directly or

indirectly contribute to each of these variables, although the effect may not necessarily be in the direction of increased turnout.

A hypothetical example of these various types of influence can be drawn from the upcoming presidential contest. Jimmy Carter's advertising might attempt to produce a more favorable attitude by claiming that he is sincere and administratively experienced (these are universally valued personal attributes of a president; if a voter believes messages linking a candidate to such subjective qualities, positive affective movement should result), and by portraying him as a constantly smiling Southerner (presidential characteristics positively valued by some and negatively valued by others; voters should readily attain knowledge about these objective attributes but change attitudinally in a positive or negative direction according to their value system).

Other Carter ads might be designed to move Ford's attitude in a negative direction by contending that Ford is responsible for unemployment (this is a universally disliked issue; if voters can be convinced to believe that Ford is associated with high unemployment, negative attitudinal movement should result), and by emphasizing and focusing attention on the importance of the Nixon pardon (an ideological object toward which the majority of the electorate has a negative orientation and already associate with Ford; if elevated in salience to the highest priority in the voters' thinking, net negative change should occur for Ford attitude and relative preference for Carter should increase). Another Carter advertising strategy might be to increase turnout behavior by reminding voters to go to the polls (by heightening the sense of citizen duty, voters should be more

likely to act upon their internalized preferences that tend to favor Carter). To the extent that the previously discussed image changes move Carter attitude toward the extreme or widen the discrepancy between the attitudes toward each candidate, greater turnout should also result.

Although the overall model of advertising effects has not been tested, evidence from three research studies bears on important components: knowledge effects, salience effects, liking effects, preference effects, interest effects, and turnout effects. In addition, there are findings pertaining to an important pre-requisite for advertising impact, exposure and attention to the messages.

Data base. The evidence summarized in this section of the paper is drawn from three survey investigations directed by the author. In one pair of studies, interviews were conducted with representative samples of 262 Wisconsin voters and 250 Colorado voters during the final days of the 1970 gubernatorial campaigns in each state. In the other survey, 323 Michigan voters were interviewed about a congressional race in the 1974 campaign. Each investigation used a 15-minute survey instrument to measure patterns of voter reception and response to television advertising for the competing candidates: Lucey vs. Olson for Wisconsin governor, Love vs. Hogan for Colorado governor, and Carr vs. Taylor for mid-Michigan congressman. For each finding described below, an accompanying code of W (Wisconsin), C (Colorado) or M (Michigan) will refer to the election where the data were gathered.

Exposure and attention to political ads. Averaging across the six candidates studied, 90% of the voters report seeing televised political

advertising (W-C-M). This rate of penetration is higher than for any other form of political stimuli in the mass media. Frequency of exposure (number of ads noticed) is primarily influenced by accessibility factors: heavy TV viewers see more political ads than light viewers, and the candidate presenting relatively more commercials than his opponent achieves a higher amount of exposure (W-C-M).

Exposed voters were also asked how much attention they paid to candidate ads. On the average, 28% say they devote "close attention", 40% report giving "some attention" and the rest fall in the "little attention" category (W-C-M). Unlike raw exposure, attentiveness isn't related to frequency of advertisement presentation or amount of voter viewing; it is largely a function of the entertainment quality of the messages and the political predispositions of the receivers. Those who feel that a candidate's advertising is entertaining pay much more attention, particularly uncommitted voters (W-C). Although most partisan voters are equally attentive (or inattentive) to each contestant's TV ads, those partisans with unbalanced attention patterns display a strong tendency to selectively attend ads for their preferred candidate (W-C). Voters who are interested in the campaign give moderately more attention to ads for both candidates (W-C-M). The strongest predictor of attentiveness is "information-seeking mode," a measure of why the voter watches political advertising. The half of the respondents who are unintentionally exposed (saying they watch just because the ads are prominently available and hard to escape) pay little attention, while those citing positive informational reasons for viewing devote much closer attention (W-C-M). Demographic characteristics such as

education, occupation, age, and sex are only weakly related to attentiveness (W-C).

Active avoidance of candidate advertising is reported by only one-tenth of the sample; most avoiders are motivated more by boredom rather than partisan defensiveness (W-C).

Knowledge effects. Two-thirds of the voters perceive that they learn something about each candidate's qualifications for office, and more than half say they gain a greater understanding about candidate positions on major issues. There is less self-reported impact on the personality dimension, as two-fifths say they become better acquainted with each candidate as a person (W-C). The entertainment value of the commercials is most closely related to these learning items (W-C). In one survey, knowledge was objectively measured by recall of candidate names and identification of their issue positions; this is moderately related to TV advertising viewing (M).

Salience effects. There is a mild impact of advertising on voter priorities among candidate attributes and campaign issues. Those highly exposed to TV ads are somewhat more likely to perceive the importance of issues and attributes most heavily emphasized in commercials (M). It is significant to note that viewing of political ads is not related to perceived importance of other conventional issues that aren't mentioned in the advertising campaigns.

Personal liking effects. Attraction toward an individual candidate as a person, aside from ideological considerations, is somewhat influenced by TV advertising: both frequency of exposure and degree of attention to a

candidate's ads mildly relates to personal affective orientation toward the candidate (M).

Preference effects. In the gubernatorial surveys, three-fourths of the voters indicated that they had decided on a candidate before the advertising campaign began. For these persons, the advertising can potentially have a reinforcement or an erosion effect. According to self-reports, one-third of this group feel that ads for their preferred candidate "strengthened your intention to vote for him" while a handful say that ads served to weaken their preference. On the other hand, one-fourth of these voters report that the non-preferred candidate's commercials stiffened their opposition to him, and one-tenth say that the competing ads increased their preference for him (the rest of the early deciders say that ads have no perceptible impact). Several factors are closely associated with favorable shifts in voting intention: entertainment value of the ads, information-seeking motivation for viewing, level of attention, and information-gain (W-C).

Among those making up their mind during the advertising campaign period, three-fifths indicate that their chosen candidate's commercials "helped you in making your decision to vote for him". Half of these late-deciders also report that the unchosen candidate's ads are helpful in deciding not to support him (W-C).

Interest effects. It was reported earlier that attention to TV ads is related positively to interest in the campaign. While this relationship may be partially due to previously interested voters seeking out closely attending ads, at least a modest contribution of advertising to interest can also be inferred.

Turnout effects. According to introspective reports, one-seventh of the voters indicate that political ads tend to "increase the likelihood that you will go out and vote on election day" (W-C). This suggests that a candidate's ads may have a limited activation effect on some potential supporters who might not otherwise bother to turn out.

Other influences on voters. Obviously television ads are not the only communication messages reaching the voter during an election campaign. The electorate is exposed to newspaper articles and editorials, television news and documentaries, informal conversations, and direct contact by candidates and campaign workers. In the congressional campaign survey, indices were created to represent overall news exposure and interpersonal exposure. Knowledge of the candidates and their positions is more strongly correlated with advertising viewing than with exposure to news or interpersonal messages; salience priorities are related to an equal extent with news and advertising, but interpersonal communication is unrelated. Each factor is correlated with interest to a similar degree (M).

In this study, the contingent relationship between advertising exposure and the knowledge, salience, interest, and liking variables was examined at high and low levels of exposure to non-advertising messages and at high and low levels of pre-campaign familiarity with the candidates. In general, somewhat stronger correlations are found for those voters who were inattentive to other campaign communications or those who were least well informed prior to the campaign (M).

Summary and Discussion. Saturation television advertising during an

election campaign is noticed by almost all voters, and most pay some attention to the messages. These ads have strong direct cognitive effects on voters' knowledge and beliefs about candidate attributes and issue positions. There is a mild tendency for attributes and issues emphasized in advertising to cause re-ordering of agenda saliences among decisional criteria. Substantial attitude creation and change can be traced to advertising influences; the effect is primarily indirect as cognitive learning combines with basic affective predispositions. Depending on the values and ideological orientations of the voter, changes in beliefs and saliences may be translated into either positive or negative attitudinal movement. To a limited extent, political ads also stimulate campaign interest and tend to heighten turnout on election day.

It is apparent that a relatively greater frequency of message presentation leads to a relatively greater frequency of exposure, but not to a greater level of attention. Qualitative characteristics of the advertisements, such as their entertainment value, may be more important in securing an attentive audience. The role of this type of variable should be more fully examined in future investigations.

The spot ad tends to overcome the barrier of predispositional selectivity. Sheer availability overwhelmed any partisan defenses at the exposure level of message reception, and only a small minority of the voters gave closer attention to their favored candidate's ads or selectively avoided the opposition candidate's ads. Most partisans are apparently willing to give the other side a hearing, but this exposure to opposition messages does not mean uncritical acceptance of the material offered.

Candidate qualifications and issue stands seem to be the content most widely learned from these political ads. The finding that the personal dimension was least affected while "hard" information was acquired by a majority of the viewers is inconsistent with much of the critical commentary scoring political advertising as an image-oriented and uninformative means of influencing voters.

The quality of attention is much more strongly related to learning than the quantity of exposure. Entertainment value of a candidate's ads also appears to contribute to increases in knowledge.

The evidence shows that TV spots may be a contributing factor in the decision-making process of those voters who make up their minds during the campaign period. More than half of this group said that political ads for both the chosen and the unchosen candidates helped them arrive at their decision. In addition, many of the partisans who had decided before the campaign began reported that they were reinforced in their decision by the ads.

The finding that voters make use of the unchosen candidate's messages suggests a counterproductive liability in the spot advertising approach: the same ads that serve to strengthen the commitment of the party faithful may simultaneously offend voters who are slightly in favor of the opponent and motivate them to move further away from the advertised candidate.

This tendency to react to ads of both candidates can be interpreted as evidence of a positive function of campaign advertising. The frequent juxtaposition of the two sets of spot ads provides viewers with an

opportunity to delineate the differences between the two candidates along a variety of attributes.

Examination of non-advertising influences on voting shows that news and interpersonal messages attain a lower rate of exposure and have less overall impact on cognitive responses. Furthermore, those voters with few prior or concurrent informational inputs learn the most from advertising.

## POLITICAL ADVERTISING EFFECTS ON VOTERS AND CHILDREN: PART TWO

## CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

While many studies have demonstrated that children learn a wide range of behavior from watching television, little research attention has focused on the role of TV in political socialization. Recent research indicates that informational programming can have important consequences for the child's development of cognitive and affective orientations toward political actors, issues, and institutions. This study extends the analysis to advertising messages, examining the impact of political campaign commercials on youthful audiences.

Since televised political advertising intrusively presents simplified and concrete information in an entertaining style with frequent repetition, it is reasonable to expect that children may acquire knowledge and develop attitudes about the candidates featured in the commercials. Thus, periodic advertising campaigns may make a significant contribution to children's basic political learning.

There is an increasing body of evidence demonstrating that similar forms of non-political television advertising has a major impact on children's consumer socialization (Ward, 1971; Atkin, 1975). Both product commercials and public service announcements designed for adults have substantial effects on knowledge, attitudes, and behavior patterns of young viewers.

Political Socialization. Political socialization is a developmental process by which children and adolescents acquire cognitions, attitudes and behaviors relating to their political environment (Hyman, 1959; Langton, 1969). Several societal agents have been identified as transmitters

of political orientations to the younger generation, especially parents and schools.

Early political socialization research focused narrowly on the family as the major agent of political learning. The family environment appears to play an important role in the development of certain political variables such as party identification, knowledge, participation, and efficacy (Hyman, 1959; Greenstein, 1965; Chaffee, McLeod and Wackman, 1973). Nevertheless, recent scholars have presented evidence which indicates that the potency of parental influence is overrated, particularly regarding the transmission of partisan attitudes and opinions across generations (Hess and Torney, 1967; Connell, 1972).

The second major agent of socialization examined in the research literature has been the school. According to Hess and Torney (1967) the elementary school plays a crucial role in teaching conceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the operation of the political system. However, Langton (1969) reports compelling evidence that formal "civics" training in the secondary school has a minimal impact on most socialization indices.

Media Effects. Until the 1970s, most researchers did not consider the mass media as a potential agent of political socialization. However, recent studies of children's mass media usage patterns demonstrate a considerable amount of exposure to politically relevant information, especially in older age groups. (Lyle and Hoffman, 1972; Hawkins, Pingree and Roberts, 1975; Atkin, 1976).

To examine the consequences of mass media exposure, Chaffee, Ward and Tipton (1970) administered questionnaires to 1300 adolescents in both May and November of the 1968 presidential campaign. They found that public

affairs media exposure was correlated moderately with level of political knowledge at each point in time. Examining cross-lagged correlations across the six-month period, they discovered that public affairs media use in May correlated +.33 with November political knowledge; this exceeded both the opposite time-order relationship and a "baseline" figure representing chance association, indicating a causal influence.

Atkin and Gantz (1975) conducted survey interviews with 700 elementary school children to determine the impact of news viewing. Political knowledge, measured by items asking for identification of leaders (i.e., Nixon, Ford, Kissinger), cities and countries in the news (i.e., Washington, China, Vietnam) and issues (i.e., Watergate, POW's, inflation), was mildly associated with news viewing. The partial correlation for national news viewing was +.23 among older children and +.03 for the younger group; Saturday morning news exposure correlated +.12 for the older group and +.06 for the younger group (partial correlation controlled for grade, sex, race and ability).

Hawkins, Pingree and Roberts (1975) reported that pre-adolescents who were heavy users of the mass media for political information in the 1972 campaign displayed substantially greater knowledge about Watergate the following spring, compared to less exposed respondents. In a study of upper elementary school students, Conway, Stevens and Smith (1975) showed that exposure to television news programming was moderately associated with perceptions of policy differences between political parties, awareness of law-making process in government, and knowledge of governmental roles.

Dominick (1972) measured self-report perceptions of the role of the mass media versus other socialization agencies among junior high school

students. The mass media were the primary sources of information about the president (83%), vice-president (85%), Congress (59%), and the Supreme Court (50%); in each case, television was cited most often.

Byrne (1969) examined affective feelings toward government in a survey of almost 400 junior and senior high school students. He discovered that adolescents exposed primarily to television news rather than newspaper news tended to think favorably about government in general, and to perceive government as performing effectively.

Political Advertising. Although this research literature has been primarily limited to news content and to cognitive learning, the findings demonstrate the important political effects that are produced by television. An assessment of the nature of political advertising indicates that these commercial messages may also be a significant source of political learning among children.

First, political ads are designed to attract attention from less involved sectors of the public through the use of generally entertaining production techniques and intrusive placement between popular programs. This increases the probability that children will view the messages whereas they might not watch extended speeches, documentaries, or articles in the print media. Thus, it is more likely that unmotivated children will view advertising messages than extended speeches, documentaries, or news specials.

Second, the substantive content of the ads is typically straight forward, uncomplicated, and explicit, emphasizing just one or two basic ideas. This should facilitate acquisition of information by cognitively unsophis-

ticated children.

Third, the generally attractive visual presentation of the candidate and the positive images associated with his candidacy should lead to favorable affective reactions on the part of the child audience. Since young people have few well developed attitudes and values relevant to politics, defensive negative responses are not as likely as with adult voters.

Fourth, political ads are presented repetitively within a short period during a campaign. This repetition should produce more exposure, allow more opportunity for knowledge gain, and heighten development of positive affect among young viewers.

Based on this rationale, it is hypothesized that children who view political commercials for a candidate will hold more knowledge about that candidate and have greater liking toward the candidate, compared to those who are less exposed to these messages.

Since younger children are at a more primitive stage of cognitive development, it is expected that they will gain less knowledge from viewing political ads than the more capable older children. On the other hand, these younger children are predicted to be more influenced along the affective dimension than older children, since they have less well formed attitudinal predispositions.

To test these hypotheses under actual campaign conditions, the Michigan Presidential Primary Election was selected for study. The investigation assesses the relationship between advertising viewing and both knowledge and liking in a sample of elementary school children in Lansing, Michigan.

## METHOD

The study employed a simple survey design to measure several basic political variables in a five-page questionnaire. On the day after the primary election in May 1976, 120 students in the third through sixth grades completed the instrument while a research assistant read each item aloud. For each of the three major presidential primary candidates, a separate set of questions was introduced with the statement, "One of the men who is running for president is (Gerald Ford/Ronald Reagan/Jimmy Carter). He has had lots of commercials on TV in the last few days. These ads show his picture and tell why people should vote for him..."

The questionnaire measured two predictor variables assessing viewing patterns: frequency of advertising exposure ("How many times have you seen commercials for Ford/Reagan/Carter?") and degree of attention ("When you saw a commercial for Ford/Reagan/Carter, did you watch all of it, or some of it, or none of it?"). These two measures were then combined into a multiplicative index of commercial viewing.

The two criterion variables were candidate knowledge and affect. To tap knowledge about each candidate, there were items asking which party he represented (a key element of political understanding), which state the man came from (since each hailed from a distinctively different area of the country), whether he had visited Lansing recently (Ford had made a whistle-stop appearance), and whether he thought the "government was doing a good job" (since incumbant Ford was defending his presidency and the other two were emphasizing anti-Washington themes). A prior page of the survey presented sets of three pictures of Carter and of Reagan, asking respondents to identify his name from among a list of seven political leaders (almost all children

recognize Ford's picture). For all of these questions, a response of "not sure" was available in addition to the multiple-choice response categories. For scoring purposes, incorrect and unsure answers were scored as 0 and correct answers counted as 1; the knowledge items were summed into separate indices for each candidate. The Washington issue perception question was eliminated from the index because it did not load with the other knowledge items.

Affect toward each candidate was measured with an item asking "How much do you like Ford/Reagan/Carter?" The scaling ranged in five steps from "like very much" to "don't like," scored 5-4-3-2-1.

For purposes of statistical control, the questionnaire also tapped amount of general exposure to national news programs (along a four-step scale from "almost every day" to "almost never") and frequency of specific viewing of news stories about the presidential candidates (from "very often" to "never"). These two items were combined in a multiplicative index, and used as a control variable to eliminate the contribution of non-advertising mass media learning about the candidates.

## RESULTS

This section first describes the absolute levels of exposure and attention to advertising messages. Then the relationship between viewing and the criterion variables is examined, with age as both a control and contingent variable; partial correlations controlling for news viewing are also presented.

Commercial Viewing. On the average, students reported seeing 3.3 commercials for Gerald Ford, 1.3 ads for Ronald Reagan, and 3.2 for Jimmy

Carter. Among those exposed, most attended closely: averaging across the three candidates, 48% of the respondents said they devoted full attention, 36% paid partial attention, and 16% gave no attention to the ads. Those who watched one candidate's ads also tended to view commercials for the other candidates; the average intercorrelation of the exposure items is +.38.

Viewing and knowledge. Partial correlations were computed between corresponding viewing and knowledge measures for each candidate, controlling for the influence of the child's grade in school. Table 1 shows that the multiplicative indices of overall viewing are correlated +.25 with Ford knowledge, +.13 with Reagan knowledge, and +.37 with Carter knowledge; the average correlation across the three candidates is +.25. When exposure to candidate news on television is controlled, these associations drop slightly to an average partial of +.21. Frequency of exposure to commercials is related to knowledge somewhat less strongly than is degree of attention, with average correlations of +.19 vs. +.26.

The strength of association between knowledge and viewing was examined separately for the younger and older subgroups of the sample. The contingent correlations show that students in the third and fourth grades appear to learn less from advertising than those in the fifth and sixth grades. Averaging across the three candidates, the correlation for young children is +.19, while there is an association of +.28 among older respondents.

Viewing and liking. Advertising reception has fairly strong correlations with affect toward the candidates. In Table 1, overall viewing of Ford commercials correlates +.45 with liking of Ford; Reagan viewing and

liking correlate +.38, and the relationship for Carter is +.50. This average association of +.44 drops slightly to +.41 when television news viewing is controlled. On the average, frequency of seeing commercials is correlated +.32 with liking, while attention and liking are correlated +.52.

To illustrate the nature of this relationship, Table 2 displays the mean liking of each candidate at four levels of exposure frequency to his commercials. It can be seen that affect rises steadily as the rate of exposure increases: across the three candidates, mean liking on the five-step scale jumps from 1.99 among unexposed children to 3.65 for those seeing five or more commercials. These data can also be examined in percentage terms. Excluding respondents who have no opinion, 33% of the unexposed group are positive toward a candidate and 67% are negative. Among those seeing one or two ads, 54% are positive and 46% are negative. The positive-negative margin widens to 73%-27% for the group exposed to three or four commercials, and reaches 91%-9% among the heavily exposed children.

Comparing the relationship for older and younger children, there is a stronger average correlation among third and fourth graders ($r = +.51$) than among fifth and sixth graders ($r = +.40$).

## DISCUSSION

The survey investigation of children's political socialization during an election campaign indicates that candidate advertising produces both cognitive and affective impact. First, the third through sixth grade sample was extensively exposed to political advertising messages; they saw an average of more than eight ads for the major presidential candidates

running in the primary campaign, and very few were totally unexposed. About half of the viewers said they paid full attention to the ads.

The correlational evidence shows moderate to strong relationships between viewing of political ads and both liking for the advertised candidates and knowledge about these men. To test for spuriousness of these associations, the age of the respondents and their viewing of news information was controlled; the partial correlations ranged form +.12 to +.31 for knowledge and from +.36 to +.48 for liking. Considering the problem of unreliable measurement with such young respondents, the strength of association is remarkably high.

The findings are more convincing due to the consistency of replication across the three candidacies studied. Since the viewing-affect correlations are highly similar for Ford, Reagan, and Carter, the generalizability of the relationship can be more confidently extrapolated. There is some diversity in the magnitude of viewing-knowledge associations, although all are positive. The external validity of the investigation is also strengthened by the nature of the election studied: it had elements of a classic presidential campaign due to the noteriety of the candidates, yet closely corresponded to typical statewide and local campaigns since the advertising was focused in only a short period just before the election and the quantity and quality of the messages was not exceptionally high. Thus, very similar learning might be expected from gubernatorial or congressional campaigns, and the findings may be somewhat applicable to both major quadrennial presidential contests and minor city council campaigns.

Although the bivariate relationships appear to be functional, there is

a question concerning the direction of causality. In many mass communication studies, correlational data between exposure and either knowledge or affect have been found to be at least partially due to reverse causation, as previously knowledgeable persons seek more media content or attitudinally predisposed persons selectively expose themselves to supportive messages. This would seem to be an unlikely explanation in the case of political advertising and children, however. Young people possess minimal prior knowledge about political candidates, and few have established predispositions that they desire to reinforce. Furthermore, exposure to commercials is more often due to availability and entertainment quality of the message rather than motivated by substantive or ideological content factors. Therefore, the most tenable inference in the absence of panel evidence is that the primary causal flow is from viewing to knowledge and liking. Subsequent research can explore this issue more closely with an over-time design.

The pattern of findings for exposure frequency vs. attention intensity shows that the number of commercials seen is less important than the degree of involvement in the message. The stronger correlations for the attention item again demonstrates the importance of atracting active interest among receivers; mere repetition of presentation achieves limited response.

The pattern of comparative effects on children of different ages is consistent with theories of child development and political socialization. The more intellectually capable older children learned the most knowledge per unit of viewing, while the more malleable younger children developed the most positive affect during while watching the ads.

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that campaign advertising directed

at adult voters may play a significant role in socializing children to the political environment. Commercials have a substantial impact in creating cognitive awarness and favorable affective feelings for candidates among young viewers in the television audience.

TABLE 1

Partial Correlations between Commercial Viewing and Candidate Knowledge and Liking

| | Commercial viewing variable: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Criterion variable: | Exposure Frequency | Attention Intensity | Exposure x Attention | E x A/ TV News |
| Ford knowledge | +.19 | +.22 | +.25 | +.21 |
| Reagan knowledge | +.06 | +.17 | +.13 | +.12 |
| Carter knowledge | +.32 | +.40 | +.37 | +.31 |
| Ford liking | +.32 | +.46 | +.45 | +.36 |
| Reagan liking | +.26 | +.44 | +.38 | +.38 |
| Carter liking | +.39 | +.65 | +.50 | +.48 |

Coefficients in first three columns are partial correlations controlling for age of child; entries in the fourth column also control for viewing of candidates in television news programs. The viewing variables were measured separately for each of the three candidates, so correlations are computed on measures with corresponding referents. N=120.

TABLE 2

Mean Candidate Liking by Frequency of Exposure to Candidate Advertising

| | Number of commercials viewed: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | None | One-Two | Three-Four | Five or more |
| Liking for Ford | 2.50 (N=26) | 2.73 (N=22) | 2.89 (N=37) | 3.94 (N=35) |
| Liking for Reagan | 1.67 (N=48) | 1.76 (N=37) | 2.13 (N=24) | 3.00 (N=11) |
| Liking for Carter | 2.07 (N=28) | 3.25 (N=20) | 3.20 (N=40) | 3.56 (N=32) |
| OVERALL AVERAGE | 1.99 | 2.41 | 2.83 | 3.65 |

Liking was measured along a five-step scale with this scoring: Like Very Much (5), Like Pretty Much (4), Like A Little (3), Not Sure (2), and Don't Like (1). Frequency of exposure was measured separately for each candidate's commercials; thus, the viewing N's vary by candidate.

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